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ABSTRACT

In seeking to explore theorists' claims that learning, education, and development in old age are linked, this qualitative study investigated how seeking a graduate or undergraduate degree functions in late-life development. Sixteen participants, ages 70 to 84, enrolled in higher education, were interviewed with a view to exploring their major developmental issues and how motivation, choice of degree, college environment, and social environment contributed to late-life development. Interviews were semi-structured, using an open-response interview guide. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis described by Glasser and Strauss (1967) and Costas (1992). Findings indicated four developmental functions that seeking the degree met for the participants: (1) repairing or enhancing self-esteem; (2) keeping old age at a distance by staying mentally active and associating with younger generations; (3) developing a mature sense of caring both for self and for others; and (4) handling loss and the grieving process due to either retirement from work or death of a spouse. (Contains 14 references.) (JB)

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Grandparents Going to College: Late-life Students

Chloe D. Little

Abstract

Theorists have implied there is a connection between learning, education, and development in old age. Linking these concepts and elders seeking a degree in higher education is at best an extrapolation because the empirical research is lacking. This qualitative study investigated how seeking a degree in higher education functions in late-life development. Sixteen participants--70 years and older and seeking a degree in higher education--were interviewed. The researcher determined seeking a degree in higher education in late-life: (1) improves self esteem, (2) reduces some adverse effects of aging, (3) facilitates a mature sense of caring, and (4) provides a new focus while resolving grief. Implication for practice are discussed.

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Grandparents Going to College: Late-life Students

Since the beginning of this century, older populations have increased in numbers as well as longevity (US Census Bureau). Not only are people living longer but they are better educated, healthier, and more financially secure than previous generations (Danner, Danner, & Kuder, 1993). The amounts of formal education and the financial status are factors associated with continued participation in educational activities (Anderson & Darkenwald, 1979; Johnstone & Riveria, 1965; Kingston, 1982). Research on participation of adults in educational activities suggests that more older adults are engaging in learning activities, both formal and informal (Crimmons & Riddler, 1985; Danner et al., 1993; Pearce, 1991).

What is particularly interesting is why older adults seek degrees in higher education in late life. We know that older adults engage in educational activities for a variety of reasons including cognitive, social, recreational, and self-improvement objectives, but we have limited information concerning what motivates them to seek a degree in higher education. One can speculate that late-life learning fulfills a function in late-life development. Aging, a lifelong activity of growing up and growing older, involves biological, psychological, and social processes. Interactions between these processes occur throughout life and are affected by social, environmental, and historical change (Riley, 1979). Erikson (1986), Moody (1985), and Jarvis (1991) linked late-life learning and life experience with adult development. In Erikson's model of psychosocial development (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986), development begins in infancy, continues through the entire life span, and ends with a final late-life stage of ego integrity versus despair. In each stage of Erikson's model, psychosocial growth occurs as conflicts or crisises arise resulting from the need to adapt to the social environment. The

resolution of all conflict is never accomplished in a single developmental stage but continues in succeeding stages. At each stage of the life cycle, the individual must reintegrate in new age-appropriate ways those psychological themes that were ascendent in earlier periods. During the last stage, the life cycle weaves back upon itself as the individual attempts to integrate the maturing forms of hope, will, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, and caring into a sense of wisdom and fulfillment. For those who are nearing the end of the life cycle, the essential task is to accept their inability to alter the past and the uncertainty of the future, to acknowledge possible mistakes and omissions, and to balance despair with a sense of overall integrity and satisfaction. Wisdom, the strength of the last stage, evolves as the individual gathers the experiences of a lifetime and integrates them into a pattern that maintains integrity in spite of physical limitations and possible mental decline.

Learning and education are strategies used for deriving and organizing meaning from life experiences, resolving tensions and transitions in life-span development, and acquiring the strength of wisdom. Kegan (1982) underscores this linkage between learning and development. He calls this process, "meaning-making conversation," in which the social forces of the world and the maturational forces stimulate development within the individual. He suggests that this conversation never ceases and is an important part of the psychosocial forces in self-preservation and self-transformation. Indeed, it is this connection between learning and development that will be explored in this study.

Moody (1985, 1986) linked late-life integrity, transcendence, and learning with education. Echoing Erikson, Moody (1986) suggests that the great psychological task of late life is establishing a sense of self, based on knowledge gained from life experience. He proposes that due to the information explosion, rapid obsolescence of information, and rapid social change, the language of information takes precedence over the language of experience making those who have mastered late-life tasks "obsolete." More

knowledge does not bring wisdom. Also, experiential knowledge alone does not automatically result in wisdom but becomes wisdom when it is understood and transformed. Moody states that this transformative process must be the task of late-life learning (1986).

For Mezirow (1991) and Jarvis (1992), the essence of development is an ongoing process that links life experiences and meaning making. Making sense of our experiences is central to developing an integrated person. These activities mean giving coherence to the experiences that begin with formative learning in childhood through both socialization and schooling and continues through the increasingly self-directed learning of adulthood. Mezirow (1991) states that interpretation of these experiences occurs through both perception and cognition. He suggests that as we age, a more mature level of cognitive differentiation involving an analysis of premises and integration of logic and feeling evolves. This ability leads to a refinement of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives as the older person differentiates and integrates his or her experience. For Mezirow (1991), perspective transformation is the central process in adult development. Both perspective transformation and adult development involve a sequence of learning activities triggered by a disorienting dilemma and conclude with a changed self-concept.

Jarvis (1992) situates learning in the paradoxes of the human experience in society where there is no truth without falsehood, no learning without ignorance, and no growth or development without learning. He says "people seek meaning for their lives and discover only that as one meaning unfolds, still more questions lie beyond it" (1992, p. xi). He suggests that learning is fundamental to human beings and to life itself begining when learners do not know, cannot act unthinkingly, or cease using a preset response. He suggests "as long as individuals respond to the disjunctures between the experiences they have and the stock of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that constitute their biography, the more they learn . . . The longer people live, the more significant their

stock of knowledge, skills, and attitudes are likely to be" (1992, p. 196). Jarvis suggests that this stock is the wisdom of elders who can synthesize it and use it in coping with a rapidly changing world. He agrees with Moody that often elders in modern society may have difficulty adjusting to social changes because modern society often treats elders as insignificant and outdated. Nevertheless, people can continue to learn and develop until the physical body cannot sustain the spirit any longer. Although people learn whether or not there are formal educational opportunities, Jarvis (1992) says that educational institutions exist to facilitate the smooth functioning of society. Without institutions, there is less opportunity for human learning and development. The individual's experiences may be restrictive and learning is limited to the primary experience of life.

Theorists have alluded to a connection between learning, education, and development in old age but the linkage of these concepts for older adults seeking a degree in higher education is at best an extrapolation. Empirical studies that explore the connection between degree-seeking in late life and late-life development are lacking.

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this study was to examine how seeking a higher education degree functions in late-life development. Specifically, the researcher sought to determine the major developmental issues of late life and how motivation, choice of degree, college environment, and social environment contributed to late-life development. The research was based on a series of in-depth interviews with sixteen late-life students (70 to 84 years old) who were seeking a degree in higher education from various universities throughout the southeastern United States. In these one to two hour interviews, a semi-structured, open-response interview guide was employed. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of analysis described by Glasser and Strauss (1967) and Costas (1992).

Findings

The participants--eight men and eight women--were enrolled in both graduate and undergraduate study. They ranged in age from 70 years old to 84 years old with an average age of 73.6 years old. Table 1 provides a general overview of the participants including the participants' ages, marital status, university, degree objective, field of study, and enrollment and graduation dates.

Table 1

Participant's Personal and Student Demographics

Name	Age	Marital Status	University	Degree Objective	Field of Study	Enrollment-Graduation Date
Anne	71	Married	UGA	PhD	Social Work	1984 Unknown
Bill	75	Married	FSU	BA	History & Humanities	1972 1984
Charles	75	Married	FSU	EdD	Higher Education	Late 1970 1984
George	70	Married	UNC-A	MA	Liberal Arts	1982 1984
Eleanor	75	Married	UNC-A	BA	Fine Arts	1987 1984
Emma	70	Married	UNC-A	BA	Literature	1986 Unknown
Harry	76	Married	GSU	BSA	Art & Ceramics	1982 Unknown
Isaac	70	Widowed	GSU	MS	Counseling Psychology	1991 1985
Judith	75	Widowed	GSU	PhD	Social Work	Late 1970 Unknown
Katrina	77	Divorced	GSU	BA	History	1982 Unknown
Lucas	74	Widowed	GSU	BA	History & Political Science	1983 Unknown
Martin	70	Married	UT	BS	Electrical Engineering	1982 1985
Nicole	84	Widowed	UT	EdS	Counseling Psychology	1981 1985
Ouida	70	Married	UK	BA	Family Studies	1980 Unknown

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Peter	70	Divorced	UT	MS	Aerospace Engineering	1982 Unknown
Rita	75	Married	UT	BA	English	1987 Unknown

Note: University: UGA=University of Georgia, FSU=Florida State University, UNC-A=University of North Carolina-Asheville, GSU=Georgia State University, UT=University of Tennessee, UK=University of Kentucky. Degree Objective: PhD=Doctorate of Philosophy, EdD=Doctorate of Education, EdS=Specialist in Education, MA=Master of Art, MS=Master of Science, BA=Bachelor of Art, BSA=Bachelor of Special Art.

The findings displayed in Table 2 show four categories with two properties each that suggest how seeking a degree in higher education functions in late-life development.

Table 2

Developmental Functions of Seeking a Degree in Higher Education in Late-Life

Functional Tasks
I. Improving Self-Esteem
A. Repairing
B. Enhancing
II. Keeping Old Age at a Distance
A. Staying mentally active
B. Associating with younger generations
III. Developing a Mature Sense of Caring
A. For self
B. For others
IV. Handling Loss and the Grieving Process
A. Retirement from work
B. Death of a spouse

Improving Self-Esteem

"Improving Self-Esteem" involved two dimensions of growth and development--the individual's motivation for seeking a degree and the benefits attained by the individual because of degree seeking. Improving self-esteem was the primary motivation for older adults seeking a degree in higher education. Self-esteem--having a favorable

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opinion and respect of one's self based on perceived worth, ability, excellence, or moral character--is influenced by environmental situations, interrelationships, individual hopes and prejudices, and education. Development of self-esteem is lifelong and changes with different life situations and experiences. The findings from this study suggest that education may function to repair or enhance self-esteem.

Repairing

To repair self-esteem, feelings of inferiority and insecurity must be addressed. Ten participants suggested that the reason for seeking a degree in higher education was a means of addressing some feeling of inferiority. For some participants, feelings of inferiority were lifelong. One participant, Fiona, described a sense of inferiority that began in her early childhood and continued into her adult life. She explained:

> As a child, if I didn't hear something, my mother would say I was stupid. This hurt me very deeply. I never said anything but vowed I was going to be better if I could. Now, I am learning and I have received quite a few compliments from the teachers. I'm beginning to build up a little of my own confidence and to become more assertive.

Nicole, the oldest participant, provided additional support for this observation. She said, "The reason I went back to school at age 65 was, throughout my life, I had no education. All my life I felt very inferior inwardly. I didn't show it, but that I didn't have an education, it really bothered me."

For other participants, feelings of inferiority occurred later in life. Although Charles graduated from a small state teacher's college with an undergraduate degree, he perceived that people in the Navy were making "snide remarks about teachers' colleges, stuff like you are an inferior being." He made the decision that "when I get out of the Navy, the first thing I'm going to do is go to a decent school. Sort of making up for a dubious undergraduate degree." Martin, too, had a college degree but a different major was needed for him to receive the recognition he desired. He explains, "One of the reasons I'm going back to school is self-esteem. It bothered me that the state wouldn't accept my application to become a registered professional engineer."

Enhancing

For some older adults, seeking a degree in higher education builds on existing skills and abilities which in turn results in the development of pride in new accomplishments and abilities leading to enhanced self-esteem. With achievement in academic arenas and self-evaluation of abilities, the individual develops a sense of accomplishment and pride in his or her learning skills. For some participants, the ability to compete with others, especially younger generations, in the academic world was a source of pride that enhanced their self-esteem. This feeling is best expressed by Peter, a graduate student, "I have a 3.68 GPA and I can compete with the kids." Other older adult students exhibited similar pride in their academic abilities. For example, Nicole, who is now a graduate student, proudly discussed her earlier academic beginnings. She explained, "I took the GED and did so well I decided to go to community college." Other participants also evaluated themselves in terms of academic standing including their grade point averages (GPA). One older graduate student in describing her student status said, "I make good grades. I was on the Dean's List. I was accepted by three colleges." Several other older students stated with pride, "I'm carrying a 3.78 GPA" and "My FSU GPA is 3.68." Another participant, Bill, modestly explained, "This sounds self-serving but I'll bring it up, with a 4.0 GPA this indicates that it (college) is easier now than it used to be."

Recognition of ability by peers, friends, and colleagues further served to enhance self-esteem. For Isaac, the invitation to join a psychology honor society was a source of self-evaluation that enhanced his self-esteem. He explained, "I have just been accepted in the society that requires a 3.5 GPA. Taking these psychology courses have really helped me a lot. I know myself better and am comfortable with myself and that makes me feel good." According to Martin, "The biggest flattery comes when my friends say, 'Boy, I couldn't do that'." Finally, the recognition by colleagues was discussed by Peter as another source that enhances self-esteem. He explained:

> In graduate school, they treat you almost as an equal. They listen to you and talk to you. They honor your opinion. Last quarter, I took a course with two PhD professors. We are working on a paper for publication with me as the first author. That is a real ego trip.

Self-recognition that one has improved one's skills and developed feelings of confidence may be the most important evidence that seeking a degree in higher education functions to enhance self-esteem. According to Rita:

> Going to school seriously has matured me. I can even drive better. I am more sure of myself. I have developed a lot of self confidence. I found I am capable of doing things I never dreamed I could do simply by being challenged. Being a student has enriched my life.

Keeping Old Age at a Distance

The aging process occurs in all living organisms. Descriptions of the human aging process frequently depict the decline of mental and physical abilities including a slowing of reaction time, a loss of memory, an inability to learn new things, wrinkled skin, gray hair, the loss of muscle strength and flexibility, and an inability to perform certain physical feats. Although the participants in this study ranged in age from 70 years old to 84 years old, all denied "feeling old" and most exhibited a high degree of physical fitness in addition to the mental fitness required to seek a degree in higher education. Aging in relation to returning to school was the second most commonly discussed topic in this study. Although no one actually stated that he or she was attending college to stay younger, seven participants discussed attending college as a means of staying mentally active. For nine participants, the social environment and their association with younger generations was an important facet of attending college.

Staying mentally active

These older students believe that staying mentally active is the key to successful aging. When asked to describe someone who has aged well, George said, "I consider a person who ages well to be one who is vigorous, physically and mentally." He believes that he is aging well. He explained, "I get satisfaction because I can continue to pursue

physical challenges such as hiking, and am able to pursue other intellectual pursuits and to understand things that I never had an opportunity to get into."

Frequently, the participants equated being in school with staying mentally active and creative. In fact, most participants believe that the ability to learn and the thrill of learning continues throughout life. According to Peter:

> The joy of learning never leaves you. I learn something every day when I go to class. I use it. It makes me think. It's stimulating. I find it stimulating and I am probably ten times as creative at work as anyone in my company.

Additionally, participants voiced a direct relationship between learning and staying young. For example, Eleanor stated, "I've enjoyed being in school. You keep learning, you stay younger for a longer time." Another participant agreed with her but emphasized the challenge related to seeking a degree. According to Lucas, "Being a student is rejuvenating. I like the challenge." Voicing similar sentiments, Annie offered a prescription for successful aging. She explained:

> I think every older person has to stay mentally active or one day begins to slip into another. It would be nice if everyone could stay physically active. But you can work at staying mentally active even if you are unable to be physical. Re-read all the books you've ever read that's one way to stay mentally active. I think everybody needs some way to keep mentally active. Otherwise you slip into being only concerned about yourself. You begin to feel rejected, to feel sorry for yourself. Or, the worst possible thing, one day begins to slip into another. To prevent this from happening to me, I go to school.

Associating with younger generations

Besides the academic aspects of returning to school, older students obtained some benefits from the social environment of college life. The older students in this study expressed the idea that associating with and learning from younger generations made them feel younger and gave them a sense of well being. According to Bill, "I strive to keep a younger outlook and that is a big value of going back and associating with young people in school." Rita echoed Bill's sentiment. She declared, "Mingling with younger students, they are very invigorating and wonderful to listen to and to watch. I think they keep you young."

The social environment of college life provided an arena for older students to examine their own perceptions while developing new attitudes which could lead to a better understanding of younger generations. One participant simply stated, "I like to be with young people. I like to hear what they think." Another participant was more specific. He explained, "One of the reasons I have enjoyed taking the courses I have taken is because I can understand some of the fields and interests that my children have. I have lots of fun discussing issues and problems with them."

Another attribute of returning to school and associating with younger generations, especially in the classroom, was the elimination of the age barriers. Lucas explained:

> Age is no barrier in the classroom. The professors treat me like a regular student. Age is a barrier in the workplace and in church, but not in school. That is one of the reasons I am happy to be back in school.

Another participant also believed that returning to school helped to reduce some age barriers, especially in his family relationships. He declared, "I went back to school because I wanted to show my children that it is possible, at my age, to go to school. I've never felt old; in fact, I don't feel any different now than when I was forty."

Developing a Mature Sense of Caring

Another motivation for seeking a degree in higher education was related to developing a mature sense of caring. Additionally, the choice of degree or the field of study frequently reflected how the participant planned to use his or her degree. With increasing age, adults express caring differently from earlier periods in their lives. When they were younger, they were responsible for providing both financial and emotional care to growing children. Additionally, they may have had the responsibility for older parents. However, by the age of 70 years, most adults no longer have young children under their care and no one in this study had the direct responsibility for an aging parent. At this time, adults begin thinking about themselves and perhaps the legacy that they will leave for the next generation. In this study, a mature sense of caring was expressed in two ways: (a) caring for self and (b) caring for others.

For self

In caring for self, the participants allowed themselves to seek a degree in higher education for personal reasons. A mature sense of caring for the self was often expressed in terms of doing things "for enjoyment" and because "being in college has enriched my life." One participant stated that going to college is "a delightful adjunct to my life. It makes life interesting." Another participant even discovered that he really "enjoyed it [attending college], even the courses I disliked intensely." Most participants agreed that they attended college because "it is something I want to do. I enjoy it. I really enjoy life."

"Personal satisfaction" and the satisfaction derived from "finding out about things" were described by some participants as reasons for seeking a degree. According to Lucas, "Being a student provides personal satisfaction. [At this age] you're not pursuing a career. You're not trying to improve your ability. You're not in a competitive situation. It's just fun." Other older students echoed Lucas stating, "I'm not doing it for a career. I'm doing it for me." However, two participants were seeking a degree for job-related reasons such as attaining state registration or as a stimulant to creativity. One participant explained that seeking a degree "got me this job."

For others

The second part of a mature sense of caring was caring for others. Maturity allows for more elaborate circumspection and brings with it more responsible watchfulness while leading to a positive direction devoted to improving the lives of others. This caring for others may be directed toward family members, friends, and people in the community and/or society. The protection of the environment can also be considered part of this mature sense of caring. Two participants wished to leave written accounts of their lives which might be useful to others who might be naturalized or first generation citizens in this country. Fiona explained:

> I want to write about my childhood experiences as a first generation American citizen. My mother and father were immigrants from Italy and Sicily. I felt they had a lot of interesting things to talk about. My younger life was rather difficult but to me it was interesting. I just thought it would be interesting to write about all the experiences I have had.

Often the participants expressed the desire to "make a real contribution." These participants wanted to provide services to society. Most participants wanted to work with younger generations. For example, Annie planned to use her degree to develop methods for the prevention of childhood suicide. She explained her doctoral study as:

> I thought no one is doing anything with childhood suicide (ages eight to fourteen years). If we find out a little bit more about the younger child and why they commit suicide, we might be able to prevent not only theirs but some teen suicides. The idea is toward prevention; if I could work with some kind of program of prevention.

Katrina is another participant who wanted to help younger children who have learning disabilities. She said, "I thought what I would like to do is tutor children who have difficulty learning. To me that would be great."

Others wanted to help college students who were having difficulty learning. Harry explained, "I am a volunteer at the university. I'm teaching young people how to read and think at the same time. I would like to continue contributing to the young people coming along." Ouida added that as a Donovan Scholar she was expected to tutor university students. She explained that upon graduation she would like to continue this activity.

Isaac and Nicole have a different approach to helping others. Isaac wanted to use his degree in Psychological Counseling to develop a program that teaches instructors. He explained his reason for developing this program as "I don't have enough years left to work one-on-one with people; so, my idea is to teach." Nicole, on the other hand, wanted to use her art and contribution to society. She related, "I went back to school because I wanted to put my art to use working with people of various ages--the emotionally and physically impaired. I intend to continue volunteer work."

A rather unique method of contributing to society was expressed by Bill. Using his interest in genealogy and preservation of archival materials, Bill wanted to develop a business for repairing and restoring old books to preserve records of historical or sentimental value such as old family Bibles and other historically important documents. He stated, "I think this will make a contribution." George and Peter expressed the desire "to leave the world a little bit better place than when (we) came in." George's intent was "to devote a good deal of my time into trying to save the environment in the mountains of Western North Carolina." According to Peter, his way of leaving the world a little better place was to develop new technologies that simplified and increased the efficiency in the work place.

Handling Loss and the Grieving Process

Handling loss and the grieving process is part of the aging process. As people age, they must handle a variety of losses. Some of these losses involve decreased physical strength, retirement from the work force, reduced income, and the death of friends, parents, a child, or a spouse. In this study, at two losses were identified--the death of a spouse and the loss of their working identity due to retirement. Although most of the participants in this study are retired, only five older students discussed retirement in relation to returning to school. Four participants in this study were widowed, only three discussed returning to school as part of their grieving. For these older students, returning to college to seek a degree helped them to handle their loss.

Retirement

Successful retirement requires a reordering of goals and developing a new *raison d'etre*. Some participants expressed being "bored" with retirement. Charles explained, "After my retirement, it was kind of boring. I hate to rake leaves and work in the yard all the time so I thought, let's go for this." Therefore, he decided to seek a degree in higher education which has offered him a challenge.

Other participants saw retirement as an opportunity to complete some "long-delayed goal" and perhaps to develop some long-hidden talents. As Bill explained, "I put off my goal until I retired when I had more time to pursue an education. I went to school and pursued various things that I wanted to accomplish like learning watercolor and things like that." Fiona is another participant who saw retirement as an opportunity to fulfill a long-held dream. She expressed her contentment,"I am very, very happy because I felt when I retired that would be the ideal time. So, I enrolled here at UNC-A."

Death of a spouse

Most of the participants in this study described long-term marriages which were more than forty years in length. Of the four participants who experienced the death of a spouse, three found comfort in being a college student. The immediate problem for the surviving spouse is coping with grief. Apparently being a student helped the participant with the grieving process by keeping him or her involved mentally and focused on some goals. For example, Lucas described his loss in the following manner:

> My wife died two and one-half years ago. I took it pretty hard. I needed something to occupy my mind. I told Barbara that I'd been thinking about going to school or getting a part-time job. She said I'd be happier going to school. She was right, returning to school has made a tremendous impact on my life.

Judith is another participant who experienced the loss of her spouse. She was taking her comprehensive examination at the time. She explained how important this activity was to her, "Definitely my crowning achievement was passing those comps. It was right after my husband died." For Isaac, attending college following the death of his spouse has given his life focus and has given him an opportunity to contribute to society. He explained, "I'm satisfied because I'm a positive influence, not only in my environment, but in the world."

Discussion and Implications

The trend toward increasing older adult participation in educational activities is demonstrated by the increase from 2% older adult participation in 1974 to 10% in 1991 (US Census). One can anticipate that in the future, older adults will continue to seek

more challenging ways to remain productive perhaps in a structured environment, such as a degree program.

This study investigated an elite group of mentally and physically active, 70-to 84-year-old individuals who are attending colleges throughout the southeastern United States. Like older adult students described by earlier researchers, these participants were individualistic and complex. However, they also exhibited some common demographic characteristics and motivations for seeking a college degree. These shared demographic characteristics included long-term marriages of more than 40 years, being healthy, being active, having the time, money, and energy to attend college, owning a home or condominium, having been employed in the work force (and some were still working), and having children who are college graduates. Some reasons for seeking a degree were a long-held desire to obtain a degree, the need to contribute to society, personal satisfaction including enrichment and enjoyment, and stimulation.

Additionally, some late-life development issues were explored. Findings suggest that seeking a degree in higher education does function in late-life development to improve self-esteem, to minimize some adverse mental effects of aging, to facilitate a mature sense of caring, and to provide a new focus while resolving loss or grief. In addition, this study provides evidence that older adults continue learning at a high level, are motivated to learn, and desire to keep physically fit. Finally seeking a degree in higher education contributes to older adults' margin of power, their sense of well-being and life satisfaction.

Implications for college and university administrators include: a need to improve the dissemination of information on existing programs, such as free tuition, to establish easier and simpler registration processes and counseling services, and to facilitate the integration of these late-life students into the mainstream of college life. Many state universities and colleges offer older adult students (62 years and older) the opportunity to attend college either tuition free or at a reduced tuition (Chelsvig & Timmerman, 1979;

Long & Rossing, 1979). Although this researcher had expected free tuition to be a typical reason for seeking a degree, like Danner, et al. (1993), free tuition was an issue with only a few participants in this study. Nevertheless, several participants in the present study stated that as long as tuition was free, "(they would) continue to take classes for as long as possible." Though these participants believed that free tuition or reduced tuition was a beneficial program for older adults, they complained that this program was not generally advertised, as Martin wryly observed "free tuition (for older students) is one of the university's best kept secrets." These findings are consistent with Buchanan's observations that "free tuition programs are unpublicized and are frequently unknown to older persons in the community or to staff and faculty at the college" (1988, p. 6).

Educational services for late-life students should not be tacked on to youth-oriented systems; rather, separate systems should be established to meet the special needs of late-life students. Perhaps using currently enrolled late-life students to mentor newer ones would encourage greater educational participation by older adults. As mentors, late-life students could reduce some procedural and psychological barriers faced by incoming older students. Another area of concern for late-life students is security. Although most of the late-life students in this study were physically fit, some described difficulties climbing stairs and steep hills to reach the classroom. Perhaps, as some earlier researchers suggested closer parking facilities and easier access to classrooms and buildings for older students would diminish these problems. Also, well-lighted parking areas and easier access to classrooms and other campus buildings for older adult students would contribute to the elder students' feelings of security and safety.

For the college faculty, recognizing that late-life students are essentially no different from other non-traditional students. They are highly motivated and possess a vast amount of experience accumulated over their long lives. Late-life students can enhance classroom interaction because of their unique knowledge and experience. By

sharing their talents and interacting with younger generations, both generations receive benefits. Through educational exchange, younger generations would benefit by developing a better understanding of the aging process and by establishing positive relationships with senior citizens. For the late-life students, the ability to continue to contribute to society and the sense of personal acceptance would reduce some of their fears about aging.

Finally, the attitudes of both college administration and faculty must change. There should be a belief in the value of education for people of all ages. Education should be seen as a continuing process that facilitates development and growth regardless of age. The endeavors of late-life students should be encouraged because society is enriched by the mature knowledge and abilities of these super senior citizens. According to Blair, McPake, and Munn (1994), having older adult students in schools is an important resource for community development.

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